Standing Committee on Community Services

Annual Report

January 2002

House of Assembly
Nova Scotia

102-04127/

Mr. Roderick MacArthur
Chief Clerk of the House
House of Assembly
Province House
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Dear Mr. MacArthur:

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Community Services, I am pleased to submit the 2000 / 2001 Report of the Committee for the Second Session of the Fifty-Eighth General Assembly.

Respectively submitted,

Mary Ann McGrath, MLA
(Halifax/Bedford Basin)
Chair
Standing Committee on Community Services

Halifax, Nova Scotia
2002

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Foreword

The report of the Standing Committee on Community Services was written according to the mandate of the committee categorizing specific topics of interest under the Departments and Ministers to which the Standing Committee can consider.

The report is written under individualized headings outlining the concerns and issues brought forth from each group /organization.

Mandate

For greater certainty the Community Services Committee is established for the purpose of considering matters normally assigned to or within the purview of the Departments and Ministers of Business and Consumer Services, of Municipal Affairs, of Health and Community Services and matters relating to the Human Rights Commission and the Nova Scotia Sport and Recreation Commission (1987 R. 60 (2); am. 1993; am. 1996)

Affordable Housing in Nova Scotia

Witnesses

Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia
Mr. Grant Wanzel - President

Antigonish Women's Resource Centre
Ms. Katherine Reed - Crisis Support Worker

Testing the Limits: An Examination of Family Housing Affordability in Nova Scotia
Ms. Louise VanWart - Author

Community Action on Homelessness
Ms. Patricia Richards - Coordinator

Background

Research conducted on urban and rural planning showed that between nine and 22 per cent of census families in these communities live in unaffordable or inappropriate housing. There is not enough subsidized housing for low income families in any of these communities. Tenant and single-parent families really stand out as suffering the most.

CBRM and Yarmouth communities have suffered from years of economic decline; both have a high proportion of low income families. In CBRM between 24 and 42 per cent of families are low income families and in Yarmouth about half of census families earn less than $30,000 per year.

Housing supply in these communities is not an issue, there are high rental vacancy rates, however it is the housing quality that is the issue. Landlords and homeowners are having difficulty affording repairs and maintenance. Families are doubling up or living in housing that is too small in order to afford housing. Although the rents are comparatively low, there are tenant families that have affordability issues. Over half of the renter families in CBRM and Yarmouth live in unaffordable housing. Economic development would be a critical approach.

In the Antigonish and Kentville areas housing stock is in critical need. Both communities face a situation where there is limited developable land and this puts pressure on the housing market which results in higher housing costs. In Antigonish what really stood out was the high proportion of family income that is paid out for housing. The average single parent tenant income is about $13,500 per year. On average 64 per cent of their income goes to rent which leaves very little left over for other essentials. In Kentville the single minimum wage earner would pay about 47 per cent of their income for rent. In both communities about 80 per cent of single parent tenant families live in unaffordable housing.

Across the province the amount of affordable housing and subsidized housing available is another difference. In Yarmouth, half of these families could live in subsidized housing. There are very few subsidized housing units in Truro, about 96-97 per cent of the low income families live in the rental market. Halifax rents are the highest in the province and the low income families bear the brunt of its expensive and tight housing market. Rental housing is expensive and difficult to find. Low income families are forced into outlying areas to find housing.

The subsidized housing that is now available is helping, but it needs to be maintained. There needs to be a broadened scope of the housing policy. The current provincial housing policy proposes to address the housing needs of Nova Scotians within existing affordable housing stock. A flexible housing policy is needed to reflect the differences across the province in the housing policy. Finally, housing cannot be dealt with in isolation. There needs to be consideration to the economic policy as well as the social policy.

A community action plan was developed in order to access monies through Human Resources Development Canada to HRM area. The amount of funding was approximately $6 million for a three-year period.

The plan looked at the issue in terms of priorities, gaps and recommendations. It identified five priority areas in HRM where homelessness was most affected those being: homelessness affecting women and children, youth between the ages of 16 and 24, people with multiple needs, housing facilities, physical facilities and the last were policy and research and the lack of it. There is no national housing policy on homelessness; there are no housing policies directly related to homelessness at the municipal or provincial level either. The action plan identifies not just people living on the street but also people living in shelters and people at risk of being homeless, people living in substandard housing.

This plan, once approved, will enable access to this funding so that the issue of homelessness can be dealt with, and assist with funding for a project that will assist people with multiple needs, to assist with some of the cost of looking at a youth shelter, and will look at some small projects in terms of renovating existing facilities.

The community action plan on homelessness identifies that the issue of affordability is what would like to seen in the long term. People are living in rooming houses that are not safe and secure and not very affordable. People are living in all kinds of arrangements that are not integrating them back into communities properly. Looking back to Antigonish, 67 per cent of women with children living in regular market rental housing said they did not have enough money for proper meals, 83 per cent said they did not have enough money for medical costs and 83 per cent said they did not have enough money for clothing. Eighty-two per cent of women and 62 per cent of men in regular market rental housing were paying more than 30 per cent of their take home pay (the majority of them being women with lower income).

In order to address the problem there needs to be support, there needs to be a focus on the situation, to identify what needs to be done in the province, rather than trying to address the issue of how to do it. To try to examine the full extent of housing need in the province, to identify its impacts on particular users and locations to locate housing needs as a province within the province as well as at the national level. Most Nova Scotians are well served by the housing industry, by mortgage lenders, homebuilders, private sector developers, housing managers and rental agents. Nonetheless, research shows that since 1991, housing poverty has grown rapidly in Nova Scotia, that the gap between the housing rich and the housing poor in Nova Scotia has widened considerably, and that relative to other provinces, Nova Scotia is falling far behind and rather quickly.

In 1991 approximately 51,000 households in Nova Scotia were said by CMHC to be in core need. By 1996 that number had risen to 58,000 households. Between 1991 and 1996, tenant core need has increased by 73 per cent of Nova Scotia, by far the highest rate of increase of any province in Canada, which as a whole had a rate of increase of 36 per cent.

In 1996 the average income of a tenant household in core need in Nova Scotia was $11,700, just $100 more than the lowest ranked which is Quebec. In 1996 Nova Scotia tenants in core need at 50.3 per cent had the highest shelter to income ration of any province in Canada, which as a whole had a rate of 47 per cent. The tenants in Nova Scotia who were in core need, had average shelter to income ratio of more than 50 per cent. In Nova Scotia rents were the fourth highest in Canada. In 1999, Halifax rents ranked tenth out of 25 census metropolitan areas in Canada.

Core need is a measure that CMHC uses to look at whether people are living in suitable accommodations. Are there enough rooms per person, is the physical adequacy of whether the housing is in good condition and is the housing affordable at 30 per cent of the income of that household. On the issue of housing adequacy, in 1996, 37,000 dwellings in Nova Scotia were in need of major repair; 9,500 were rented and 27,500 were owned. Seventy per cent of Nova Scotia's dwellings in need of repair were occupied by households earning less than $30,000 per year. On the matter of overcrowding, between 1971 and 1991 there were dramatic decreases in the rates of overcrowding across Canada. However, between 1991 and 1996, there were dramatic increases in overcrowding. Nova Scotia's increase was 188 per cent; it far exceeded the rate of increase of the other Atlantic Provinces.

In terms of new supply, in 1993, the federal government withdrew from funding new social and public housing. This had a dramatic impact on Nova Scotia. The province went from building 107 units of new social housing in 1992 to 67 units in 1993 and further down to 30 units in 1994. With the exception of the new men's shelter in Halifax, there has been no new social housing built in Nova Scotia since 1994. It is clear the housing need in Nova Scotia is high and that it is increasing across the province. It is also clear that the character of need varied dramatically from one part of the province to another. Tenant needs is a general problem across the province. First Nations housing is known to be in

a deplorable condition. There are increasing needs related to the state of repair of our existing housing stock. It is critical that an effective way be found in protecting, maintaining and upgrading existing stock of affordable housing.

Nova Scotia clearly needs federal funding. If there is more housing to be got, there needs to be more money. There is a really serious problem with Nova Scotia's capacity to actually deliver. Over the years the province has allowed the ability to actually deliver affordable housing to decline dramatically. The need is so specific in communities that without community initiatives, we are at a dead loss to be able to do anything about this.

Researching housing needs is very difficult. There must be a way to identify its extent, its nature, location by location in a desegregated detailed and specific way. To understand what the relationship is between the rental sector, the public sector and the home ownership. Nova Scotia needs a housing strategy of its own, not to replace CMHC, but to find a way to identify the problems, ways to mobilize the resources to address them in a way that is efficient, economical and sustainable.

Matters of Discussion

There were a number of matters discussed during the meeting. Outlined below are the topics that were dealt with during the meeting.

Differences in provincial strategies.
New Brunswick's rate of increase has not been nearly so great as it has been in Nova Scotia. The province gave housing a priority some years ago and actually encouraged community based housing groups and the Provincial Association.

British Columbia has maintained, all through the time that the federal government has actually backed off, a small social housing program; Quebec too has done that. New Brunswick claims to have maintained a program in affordable housing, and Saskatchewan has been quite innovative over the last several years in dealing with remote housing issues.

Municipal support.
Municipalities are not always reluctant but they are reluctant because they do not have the finances. They do have a role to play. The problem is that they are not taking that role onto the next level. Policy planning could be done at the municipal level. They can be involved in the land issue and probably at some points in terms of inspection. Inspection and rooming houses and substandard housing is very much a municipal responsibility and resources need to be put into that.

Housing was a provincial responsibility. If the province were to fully take up its responsibility as the provincial agency to develop a strategy and oversee that strategy then the municipal governments should be absolutely essential as a partner in this. Municipalities can give tax exemption and other things. The real problem is developing the capacity to take advantage of those tools, to make things happen.

Co - op Movement.
The continuing co-op movement, accessed with federal monies, built single family dwellings, duplexes and multiple unit building. The tenants had a sense of ownership, they managed the properties and had some direction in the outcome of those properties and how well they were managed. This is perceived to be a very good model.

Senior Housing Opportunities.
Issues need to be addressed on how to keep seniors in their communities. A 1998 a report by the Housing Department contained significant references to seniors' housing and identified it as one of the priority needs of policy. There was emphasis on trying to find ways to keep people in their own homes. The problem is that people with declining incomes are going to have a hard time hanging onto their homes much less maintaining it and keeping it up to standard.

Provincial Policy.
There are a lot of programs which are very good, but have no coherent policy. There is a misfit between the programs that are there and how the need is actually evolving because the need has changed. The needs have to be developed further with more research. Some housing problems are not about housing, it is about income, it is about finding ways of actually staying in a decent house and having the necessary community supports to be able to do that. Developing understanding of local need, re-establishing the capacity to deliver, to maintain, to upgrade and above all the importance of the public investment already made in public and social housing, co-ops, non-profits in municipal and in public housing.

Documentation Required

There was no documentation requested by the Committee.

A copy of the transcript of this meeting is available from the Legislative Committees Office. The transcript can also be found online at the following address:
http://www.gov.ns.ca/legi/hansard/comm/cs/cs010301.htm

Secure Treatment Program

Witness

Department of Community Services
Mr. Bob Fowler - Assistant Deputy Minister
Mr. George Hudson - Executive Director, Finance and Administration
Ms. Debra Burris - Children and Family Services Division
Mr. Steve Bone - Communications

Background

In the fall of 1997 there was an announcement that a secure treatment facility would be built in the Truro area. In the fall of 1999 the Department of Community Services began a process with the Town of Truro to talk about the secure treatment facility. In Truro, the province owns a little more than 100 acre plot of land located on the former Nova Scotia Residential School area. That building closed in 1997 but has been maintained. The plan was to renovate the buildings and convert it at a cost estimated to be about $4million, into the secure treatment facility. The projected annual operating costs will be $2 million.

Staffing will be very much a professional, mulitdisciplinary approach. There will be a manager, a clinical social worker and a nurse. There will also be contracted clinical services of psychiatry and psychology. There will be a large component of youth care staff and unit supervisors for that staff as well as teachers.

In addition to being a 20-bed residential facility it will also be a co-ed facility. It will be a one-level building and house counseling and different types of office, an activity room and administration offices. There will be a family unit to allow for reintegration with the family. The family can stay for a few days or a weekend. It is stressed that this is not a young offender's facility, it is a secure treatment facility and being a secure treatment facility is will be locked but not barred. Children in care of the Minister will range in age from zero to 21.

The department is hoping that there will be a good rapport with the community with things like volunteer participation as well as public service groups who might want to take secure treatment under their wing. They are hoping to be able to develop some community partners to develop goodwill around the centre.

It is time limited. Under the Children and Family Services Act it basically has a five day, 30 day and 90 day-plus. The five day admission to the program would be under a ministerial certificate that is only good for 30 days. If a child is placed in secure treatment under one of those certificates, they cannot remain there beyond the five days unless and the agency takes the matter before the Family Court, under the child welfare legislation, and asks for an extension to 30 days.

The agency has to show that the child has a behaviourial and /or emotional disorder. They have to show that they need to confine the child in order to treat or alleviate that problem. They need to be able to show that the child is unable or unwilling to consent to his own treatment. If the agency wants to go beyond the 30 days (and there is a belief and the assessment shows that the child needs to stay beyond that), to a 90-day time frame they would have to go back to court. Each time-frame beyond the five-day certificate must be granted by the court.

Secure treatment is not a stand alone, it is a part of what is referred to as a continuum or a range of services for children and their families who need intervention. That can start with early intervention and prevention and run all the way through to community supports or in-home supports. It could be a day treatment program, or it could be moving into a placement or foster care scenario. Secure treatment service is a service with a continuum of its own. It is not a building. It has relationships with the community, with schools, with other residential facilities within the range of services. It has relationships with home and family. Secure treatment is treatment focused. It is intensive treatment by highly trained professional staff that includes clinical staff from professional youth care workers to clinical social workers, psychology, psychiatry. The security, in most respects, is provided through the staffing and through the treatment that will emanate from all aspects of this program. A primary goal would be to stabilize children and youth, and reintegration, back either to their families or to their home communities.

The centre is not going to necessarily be a cure-all or a panacea, nor is it intended to be an alternative to a young offender facility. It is for children with serious emotional or behaviourial problems. Children who were abused and neglected, with challenging behaviours like self harm, attempted suicide, exhibiting out of control or extreme defiance, addiction issues, runaways, amongst others.

Matters of Discussion

There were a number of matters discussed during the meeting. Outlined below are the topics that were dealt with during the meeting.

In province Care.
This program will not eliminate children being sent out of province. There are specialized treatment facilities available in some jurisdictions that are not presently in Nova Scotia. The program will be able to limit the number of children that go out and provide better services coupled with enhanced mental health services.

Contract of Services.
Psychologists would be on contract full time and it is hoped that a psychiatrist would be there on a retainer. They will have offices on site. The manager, nurse clinical social worker, unit supervisors, and all of the youth care workers will be full time employees on the premises (on-site). The teachers are separate because they will be funded through the Department of Education. In total there will be 35 FTEs, 29.7 of which will be FTE youth care workers.

In addition, the facility will be provided in-kind with services from the Department of Justice and Mental Health Services. They will have health facilities available at Colchester Regional Hospital, and the IWK has a mental health program that will be available at no charge.

Security.
The facility will have surveillance monitoring systems, i.e., cameras, security doors, however, it will not be a barred facility. The recreational area outside will be fenced in, but it will not be like a prison fence. It will minimize the incidents where children would actually be able to leave the building without permission.

Transportation.
Children's Aid will be in charge of transportation services of the child under the Family Court Order. The transportation will be done by a trained social worker and under all of the normal child welfare practices.

Documentation Requested

The standing committee requested the following documentation:

The amount of money that the department is to budget for contractual services.
The secure treatment budget for contracted psychiatry and psychology services is $210,000.00 (Two hundred and ten thousand dollars). This is part of the projected $2 million for annual operation costs.

A copy of the transcript of this meeting is available from the Legislative Committees Office. The transcript can also be found online at the following address:
http://www.gov.ns.ca/legi/hansard/comm/cs/cs010426.htm

Society for Women Healing from Addictions and Abuse

Witness
Society for Women Healing from Addictions and Abuse
Ms. Joanne Bernard - Coordinator

Background

The Women's Addiction Abuse Committee was developed in January 2000. It was composed of organizations from the community that assisted women in crisis. For years women who have completed detoxification programs through Drug Dependency Services have had to face a tremendous gap of service when they came out of those programs. They would complete a 28-day detoxification program, they come out and they have no place to resume their recovery. The women often go back to the environment that is not conducive to their recovery. They had no safe place to go to continue to work on the issues that might have been contributing to their drug use in the first place.

In Nova Scotia there are five such facilities for men, which do tremendous work and is a proven model of what happens when an individual is given a safe place to continue their recovery after they have gone through a detoxification program. For women this gap in service has been an issue for the last 20 to 30 years. In 1989, the mayor's Task Force on Drug Awareness had heard from individuals who came forward and said that a safe place for women to continue their recovery program had to be a priority.

Between 1990 and 1997 there were three documents that were published by individual and academics using interviews from women who used the services of like organizations that helped women in crisis and every one of those women said they needed a place to go to resume their recovery.

Presently when women are in detoxification, they are placed in co-ed programs. For many of these women (up to 17 out of 20 in many studies) they have had histories of sexual abuse in their childhood. The issues that contribute to why these women are abusing substances in the first place do not get addressed.

What the Women's Addiction Abuse Committee did in the past year and a half was put in a funding proposal for a coordinator with the securing community partnerships initiatives, – a federal program that addresses individuals who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. This committee coalesced and in February, through a grant from HRDC, a coordinator was employed to put together a proposal to be submitted to the Steering Committee on Homelessness for a long-term residential facility for 12 women struggling with addictions and in recovery. That proposal was approved in April. Although it has been the practice that when the federal government comes into town with oodles of money and starts up a project it leaves and the provincial government is left holding the bag. This time the provincial government decided to take the bag and they have come on board

through the Departments of Health and Community Services to address this gap in service. Women are relapsing and the repeater rate within detoxification programs is incredible. Women have been referred to out-of-province facilities because this type of facility did not exist. Women are dying because they cannot get out of the trap of prostitution and drug abuse. Out of the 265 women who have gone through the Nova Institution in Truro, 255 of them have taken advantage of the counseling on drug abuse in that centre.

The Centre, known as the Marguerite Centre, has been incorporated into the Society for Women Healing from Addictions and Abuse. Its board of directors includes representatives from First Voice, the Department of Health, retired corrections, retired drug dependency, former MPs and lawyers. The Marguerite Centre will be a long-term residential facility for 12 women. It will employ a womens-centred approach to counseling, and it will look at the holistic view of why women abuse drugs. There will be drug abuse counseling, sexual abuse counseling, parenting, relaxation techniques, education, employment, and regular coping skills that these women have either never had or have lost. The centre will have the donated services of the Women's Employment Outreach to do employment counseling session. Individuals from the Department of Justice will talk to them about anger management. Lawyers will provide legal advocacy works pro bono and a reflexologist to help in doing relaxation techniques.

For many of the women who will be utilizing this facility they will already have placed their children in voluntary care. This facility will offer them a place for their kids to come and visit with them. Eventually the centre will promote overnight visits. When women feel they have recovered enough and have a positive life goal with objective they will go into the centres partner organization, Alice Housing, for transitional housing.

One of the main focuses of this facility is to stop the generational cycle of substance abuse, income assistance, prostitution and violence. It costs the province and amazing amount of money to keep children in voluntary care and it costs even more if these kids grow up angry and feeling neglected or if they are abused and they start the same cycle that their mothers did.

This is really a proactive interventionist facility for children and it is a recovery centre for women. This facility is really going to address the problem of the family unit reconnecting and growing in a positive sense. The centre will have parents on their board who have raised foster children, and will employ a part time children's counselor. In collusion with child services and Community Services, women who have supervised visits with their children can come to this centre instead of meeting at the mall or in a cold case room in the Department of Community Services, or other such places.

The Marguerite centre will not be a place for women to go who are imposed by the courts. There will be women who have come out of penal institutions who will be using the centre. It would be the type of centre that would be the service after women have finished a 28-day program or an addiction program.

In terms of substance abuse, it will not be a gambling centre for women who have gambling problems unless there are substance abuse addictions that coincide with their gambling addiction. There is no priority ranking for substance abuse. It will be zero tolerance. The women who come to this facility will be required to go through some sort of detoxification before they come to this facility.

Matters of Discussion

There were a number of matters discussed during the meeting. Outlined below are the topics that were dealt with during the meeting.

Terms of Financing.
The centre has federal government funding until March 31, 2003. There will be a fund-raising component within that as well. The Provincial Department of Health has agreed, through the budget proposed in collusion with Community Services, to pay a per diem which will either be through grants or through per diem rates. Housing services under the Department of Community Services, has been extraordinary in helping with shelter costs.

In meeting with representatives from Community Services, the centre representatives had asked not for new money from income assistance, but merely for money to be redirected. The majority of the women who will be using the centre will be on some sort of income assistance. What they had asked for was for those funds to be redirected to the shelter to help provide some sort of rental revenue.

The centre also received a written letter of support from the municipality and will be working with the grants committee of the municipality to look for some tax relief on the shelter tax and then grants in the long run.

Long term Funding.
There is always a tenuous relationship between grant funding and per diems and the non-profit sector and government. However government can pay for years to come in the long term in terms of these women, violence and whatever that is associated with crime costs and their children or they can help these women have positive lives so they can go back to their communities and live responsibly within them.

Provincial Funding for Women not in Receipt of Social Assistance.
No woman will ever be refused admission into the centre. For women who are on income assistance, those funds will be redirected. For women who have the ability to pay, they will be asked to pay a small portion which will be applied to rental revenue. If there is no ability to pay, they are still admitted to this Centre and the centre will direct their fund-raising to meet those needs. They would never, ever deny someone the opportunity for recovery based on their income situation.

Fundraising.
The per diem from the Department of Community Services based on income assistance is $10 per day. They are allowing the centre $225 plus $180 for a maximum of $405 per month. In terms of fundraising the centre is eligible for a considerable number of grants both within Nova Scotia and across the Country. They also have numerous interests in private funding opportunities. Donations and fundrasing will probably be between $50,000 and $75,000 per year. The centre is also eligible for renovations under CMHC funding.

Documentation Required

There was no documentation requested by the Committee.

A copy of the transcript of this meeting is available from the Legislative Committees Office. The transcript can also be found online at the following address:
http://www.gov.ns.ca/legi/hansard/comm/cs/cs010531.htm

Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities

Witness

Ms. Stephanie Vogler
Executive Director - Kings County Alternative Transportation Services
Chairperson - Nova Scotia Community-Based Transportation Association

Ms. Nancy Wright
Board Member - Guysborough/Antigonish Dial-A-Ride Association
Facilitator - Nova Scotia Community-Based Transportation Association

Ms. Elsie Cholette
Coordinator - Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities

Background

Nova Scotia has the highest percentage of persons with disabilities, 3.7 per cent higher than the national average in 1986 and 5.8 per cent in 1991. The majority of persons with disabilities are over 55 years of age. The second largest group is between 35 and 54 years of age. Mobility disabilities account for almost one-third of all disabilities in Nova Scotia; agility disabilities account for almost another one-third. Although most are mild or moderate in nature, severe disabilities account for a full 17 per cent to 19 per cent of all disabilities in both Canada and Nova Scotia.

In the Annapolis Valley and Hants, 1991 figures show 23,795 persons, or 22.5 per cent with disabilities. More than 14,000 persons in Annapolis Valley and Hants, with disabilities relating to either mobility or agility, are estimated at 60 per cent which is less than two-thirds. In 1991, unemployed persons with disabilities in Nova Scotia who are seeking either full time or part-time employment is 92 pr cent or 8,550 persons.

The report of the Provincial Health Council of Nova Scotia outlined several goals that were quoted by the presenters during this meeting. The first is **Management: Ensure that the resources needed to support health are managed wisely and fairly**. To bring attention to the community level programs such as transportation.

Second, **Social Justice: Ensure that all Nova Scotians have the opportunity to achieve health**. The policies put in place must address these factors that affect our health.

Third, (recommendation # 11) quoted from the Provincial Health Council of Nova Scotia's report **"That government enhance public policy and action around provision of public transportation that will support access to health services and opportunities for health living for all Nova Scotians."**

In Kings County their service is able to operate because of the gifts that their volunteer drivers provide. They have a team of 12 active volunteers who receive payment for services in mileage reimbursement at .31 cents per kilometers. "It is important that when decisions are being made that affect the community, that the people who are working in the community are part of that big picture." There are a lot of good things happening in Kings County and other counties across the province, but what needs to be there that is not a guarantee is sustainable funding.

The Guysborough/Antigonish Dial - A - Ride pilot project was part of the province's inclusive transportation program. The number one issue facing seniors, which they were most concerned about, was transportation. Second was health and third was housing. Dial- A -Ride is also trying to move from looking at just the needs of seniors and persons with disabilities to looking at an inclusive model which would mean addressing the needs of low income families, children with special needs, and anyone in the community who found themselves at a transportation disadvantage.

The Guysborough/Antigonish Dial-A-Ride attempted to provide that same kind of service. They were able to recruit 24 volunteer drivers who began to deliver this service. The drivers were paid $5, $10, $15 gas reimbursement depending on the distance travelled. The access by social assistance recipients has been pretty much non-existent. Seniors have used this program and persons with disabilities. However, the organization would like to provide a service that anyone can use. They are trying to work that through particularly with the new changes to social assistance. The $18 a month for long term recipients has not enabled anyone on Social Assistance to use the transportation system.

Another issue faced by these types of organizations is insurance. There have been some real questions about volunteer insurance. Some insurance companies have taken volunteers off the road. They are not comfortable or confident with the fact that volunteer drivers should receive coverage for what they are doing. They see them as being paid. The board liability has been a real problem. The program insurance has been a problem. They have had to fight to try to find ways to explain to insurers what it is that they are trying to do in providing this kind of service to the community.

Another issue is inclusivity. These organizations feel that they have not been able to serve persons with disabilities well. They have volunteers driving their own cars, but they do not have accessible vehicles. They are trying to build it in so that they can provide every range of transportation service needed to the people who have those disadvantages.

Lastly, is education and awareness raising. People have been hesitant to really feel the commitment. They know it is a pilot, they know it could be gone and so they (organizations) have not been able to build the community confidence that this is going to be here in the long term. The organizations are moving toward trying to secure more funding, to look at expanding the service to include some regular bus routes to the rural areas and are going to try to build some of the partnerships with Health and Education

Health and Education have been the two areas where these organizations expected to be able to build more partnerships, provide transportation for school boards and being able to do some of the transportation needed from the nursing home that ambulances now provide.

The Nova Scotia Community-Based Transportation Association recommended moving forward in developing a provincial organization that would look at community-based transportation. To move forward with a vision for providing transportation services to people in Nova Scotia who are disadvantages. The association is going to be focused in the coming year on trying to move forward on the education and policy development issues and also to look at how to develop services that they can offer to other groups.

One of the criteria they are looking for is that the needs are community-generated. The needs arise from a process of consultation. Groups who are inclusive, who really do the job of needs assessment at the community level adequately and also who are really prepared to take that and build partnerships in the community and create community-based transportation organizations.

As this new association develops it is going to try to provide the resources and support to the organizations who are coming forward and also to reflect on policy. To look at what the province is doing and how it impacts on the community groups, to enter into an ongoing dialogue about how to make the program work, how to make the program accessible, the kinds of evaluation measures that should be put in place, and how to really create a service in Nova Scotia which is badly needed.

It was presented how vital it is to have accessible transportation for persons with disabilities. NSLEO has been fighting hard to acquire this and by doing so three pilot projects were executed. One each in Yarmouth, Truro and Antigonish.

At the end of March 31, 2001 the time frame for the three pilot projects will terminate, funding will be stopped. However the government -- in their Throne Speech -- stated that it will implement the rural and semi-rural inclusive transportation support program which will provide Nova Scotians with disabilities great access to transportation services.

Statistics Canada indicates that in Nova Scotia, 13.3 per cent of unemployed persons are in the rural regions where there is no access to transportation. Transportation is a major component and plays a very important role in a transition to work. Persons with disabilities include not only mobility but mental health consumers, visually impaired, hard of hearing, and so forth all with very different needs.

The accessible transportation is only one component to employment. Others include job placements, are there good jobs in the private sector that can accommodate the needs? The availability of technical aids, the qualifying for training, do they fit in the guidelines that are already in place? To have doctors, who are overworked now, to do another assessment on each and every disabled consumer.

Medication is another concern, persons with disabilities will be covered by the department for 12 months once they start work. However, most mental health consumers rely on their medication daily, some cannot function without it. The wages earned will not be that great for persons with a disability to cover the costs of such medications. In all reality, it would be reasonable to have the Department of Community Services cover the medication at all times.

Persons with disabilities may only get work, for example in a call centre which has irregular hours, and this poses a barrier because the accessible taxis do not operate after certain times and on weekends. The Access-A-Bus is only for persons who are registered with them, and take bookings in advance. "If a person is sick one day and cancels the pickup a record is kept, and after five cancellations that person is penalized."

The government needs to be held accountable to persons with disabilities in getting and sustaining worthy jobs in society. They must work collectively with other partners to make this happen.

Matters of Discussion

There were a number of matters discussed during the meeting. Outlined below are the topics that were dealt with during the meeting.

The percentage of persons who have physical disabilities in relation to persons with mental disabilities.
The Kings County Alternative Transportation Association provides wheelchair accessibility for about 60 per cent of people who have varying degrees of mental disabilities and about 20 per cent of that figure also have physical and mental disabilities.

A good percentage of these people who do have mental disabilities, about 50 per cent, are going to sheltered workshops, but that is what they do for employment.

Funding.
The municipality of Kings receives $24,000, $14,000 of which covers the cost of mileage to reimburse the drivers; the other $10,000 is to support the other half of a position in the office, Kings Co. Alternative Transportation Association, that HRDC was supporting. Currently they do not receive any funding from the province. Monies that they do receive from the Department of Community services are per trip.

Presently users of the Kings Co. Alternative Transportation Association pay a $5.00 annual registration fee plus $3.00 per trip one way for this service.

Federal funding is a little bit shaky. For the last three years Alternative Transportation Association have been funded by HRDC under an employment assistance contract. They have been told that when their contract ends on July 31st, should they choose to write a new contract, there will be no guarantee. They have been told by HRDC that the terms and conditions of their current contract no longer afford HRDC the ability to provide Kings Co. with that money.

The Guysborough/Antigonish Project, received certain amount of funds from the province, but they also accessed CRP federal funding, HRDC funding and a bit from the municipalities, about $2,000 was given to the seniors' group as start-up funds.

HRDC needs to understand that if the provincial government has made a commitment to put funding into recognizing the need across the province, then HRDC needs to reach one level above to the federal government and create a new program in partnership with the province that would allow funding from that level.

Municipalities at this point are seeing themselves as an integral part to this process of providing inclusive transportation. Municipalities are involved in the process of encouraging the program and in trying to implement the program at that level, however, there needs to be more municipal involvement.

RDA's could certainly play a role in providing resources and support to these organizations, they are going to need that capacity and those skills. The need to use a process of asset mapping to determine what the community already has that can be applied to that need.

There needs to be some dissemination of information down to the levels in the community where people can make use of those types of things. There needs to be sustainable funding.

Insurance.
Presently three kinds of insurance are needed to assist these organizations. The board of directors needs liability insurance; and program insurance for the actual program that they are delivering. Then the individuals need to have their own personal insurance cleared by their insurer. The insurers have to be informed that they are driving people, not for money but for a donation for gas. The organizations need a certificate from each insurer saying that they know this person is driving in that organizations program and that certificate has to be on file with the organization for their insurance.

One of the roles the NS Community-Based Transportation Association is going to play is looking at and maybe being able to get insurance policies that cover every volunteer in the province and maybe receive discounts for the board liability insurance.

Documentation Required

There was no documentation requested by the Committee.

A copy of the transcript of this meeting is available from the Legislative Committees Office. The transcript can also be found online at the following address:
http://www.gov.ns.ca/legi/hansard/comm/cs/cs010329.htm

Human Resources Development Canada

Witness

HRDC
Human Resources Programs and Services
Ms. Jeane King - Director

Human Development Programs and Services
Ms. Evelyne Power Reid - Regional Manager

Income Benefits Programs
Mr. David Kay - Regional Manager

Intergovernmental Affairs
Ms. Karen MacInnis - Regional Manager

Background

HRDC's mission is "to enable Canadians to participate fully in the workplace and the community."

There are 19 Human Resources Centres of Canada of various sizes, divided into four networks. Through these centres, individuals can apply for income security programs or employment insurance. They can also obtain labor market information, information on career options, as well as electronic information on job opportunities. The Human Resources Centres also deliver active employment programs. Individuals can also receive help in searching for work and writing resumes.

HRDC has four program business lines: Labor, which promotes a fair, safe, healthy, stable and productive work environment within federally regulated work sites; Income Security, which provides income support to Nova Scotians through the Old Age Security Program, including the Guaranteed Income Supplement for those who qualify. HRDC also administers the Canada Pension Plan and all it entails; Employment Insurance, which supports unemployed Nova Scotians in getting back to work by providing temporary financial assistance while they are looking for employment; and Human Resources Investment Programs, which helps the Government of Canada promote its employment, youth, learning and literacy agendas by enhancing Nova Scotians' employability, helping unemployed people find and keep jobs and deliver, in cooperation with the province, active employment programs.

Other programs available to Nova Scotians. Employment assistance service is a program to support individuals looking for work by improving their job search skills and resume writing abilities. The labor market partnership program supports and encourages employers and communities to improve their capacity for dealing with human resource requirements and labor force adjustments. HRDC also has programs which focus on youth, the homeless, persons with disabilities and aboriginal peoples. They also administer the Student Summer Job Action Program that provides a wage subsidy to employers who wish to hire a student for the summer months.

Persons with disabilities who are not employment insurance eligible can access the Opportunities Fund which assists these individuals in preparing for obtaining and keeping employment or becoming self-employed, and also the Employability Assistance for People with disabilities Program. This is a cost-shared agreement between the Government of Canada and the Province of Nova Scotia.

Through the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative, HRDC works in partnership with nationally-identified communities to develop an action plan for those who are homeless or are threatened to become homeless. Under the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy, HRDC has two agreements, one with the First Nations, which serves on and off reserve members, and the other with the Native Council of Nova Scotia, which serves all other Aboriginal persons in the province.

Service delivery and quality implementation. These two commitments are closely linked. HRDC is committed to delivering quality-driven programs and services in a manner that respects the needs and values of clients, communities and citizens. They are committed to meeting or exceeding these standards in all of their business lines.

Skills' agenda. This initiative reflects the need to ensure Nova Scotians have the necessary skills to be competitive and to participate in labor market opportunities. HRDC Nova Scotia will contribute to this priority by strengthening regional labor market information products and expanding relationships with employers, employee groups and educational institutions, as well as supporting the skill requirements of individual Nova Scotians.

Federal - Provincial relations. HRDC works with various federal and provincial departments in a collaborative manner to assist Nova Scotians to meet their employment and employability needs. HRDC is working with other levels of government and community groups by encouraging collaboration and leadership on labor market and human development issues that support social and economic development.

Human Resources Development Canada would like to stress the close working relationship that they have with Nova Scotia's communities and citizens through their local offices.

Matters of Discussion

There were a number of matters discussed during the meeting. Outlined below are the topics that were dealt with during the meeting.

Programs or Agency set up to assist Status First Nation Peoples off reserves.
HRDC does have two agreements and the agreements do cover services directly to all Aboriginal people in Nova Scotia.

Employment Insurance for seasonal workers.
There have been some changes to the employment insurance legislation. The intensity rule has been eliminated and this means that all claimants will receive at least 55 per cent of their maximum insurable earnings. By that adjustment, claimants who have been adversely affected by previously drawing employment insurance, that has been eliminated by this recent legislative change. The intensity rule was introduced in 1996 to discourage repeated E.I. usage and it also reduced the benefit rate for every 20 weeks of regular earning that claimants had.

Canada Pension Plan Disabilities.
The individual submits an application with supporting documentation and that information is then assessed in the Halifax Office by medical adjudicators. A decision is rendered based on the information provided. Once that process is complete, the client is informed whether or not they have met the criteria under CPP.

The individual who is approved for benefits starts to receive benefits from the date their disability is determined. Those who do not qualify are offered other information related to other supports, and are also given the opportunity to have that decision appealed. The appeal process is done independently of the initial review by another individual and then another decision is rendered at that stage, and again, the client may be allowed benefit or not and depending on that decision it can move, if the client so desires to another level of appeal which is called a review tribunal and is independent of government. In summary there are several steps to an appeal process. First is the reconsideration stage, then there is the appeal to the review tribunal and then the client has the right to ask for leave to appeal to the Pension Appeals Board. Further beyond that is the federal court.

This year HRDC has a number of initiatives planned to improve the information available to citizens around the Canada Pension Disability. They are going to start contacting clients earlier on in the application stage to explain to them up front what the requirements are and to give them information to help understand exactly how the application process will occur. Then HRDC is going to look at the content of the letters that they send to clients to try to improve the legislative references and make those letters much more friendly in terms of assisting clients to understand where HRDC is coming from.

Guaranteed Income Supplements.
The GIS is income tested so that all income including interest or other earnings is included in the yearly assessment of the GIS payment. However, the next year the income would be assessed on exactly what the individual was getting. It would go back to the original amount, but it would be affected by any fluctuation in the current in terms of income. Any interest that is paid is included as income in the current year. It is included in the assessment of the earnings of an individual and does impact the amount of GIS that an individual is entitled to.

The Guaranteed Income Supplement, the income that is reported is consistent with that which is considered as income for the Canada Renewal Agency. HRDC uses information from Revenue Canada to determine the level of the GIS. HRDC hanged the year to better enable clients to get that information into Revenue Canada, so they moved the commencements of the GIS payment to July.

Consistency in Training Programs.
Training programs that are paid for in part or whole is picked up by HRDC, however, people in the same program may be getting a different benefit from others. People who go to training in different institutions will find that other people are receiving different levels of support. This is based on the process of developing a personal action plan, a career plan, and what training requirement the client may need. HRDC has a consistent process through which they determine the level of financial support the client requires, based on incremental costs incurred to participate in that training and their ability to support themselves during training. The client could be receiving E.I. Benefits as well as supplementaries required due to child care, transportation costs, having to reside in a different location, among other things.

Program Eligibility.
Eligibility for programs is linked to the Employment Insurance Program. For people who have been home caring for children, the reach-back period is five years. Individuals who have been on regular E.I. benefits qualify for the three years within that time frame. When an E.I. claim terminates, those individuals are still eligible for what is described as HRDC; s active employment measures. Using the three-year time frame for those who had attachment to the labor market and had an active E.I. claim, and for those who were out of the labor market for maternity or paternity leave purposed, the five years, they may not have any more continued income support through the E.I. claim, but they may qualify for other active measures.

Individuals are entitled to direct income support for a period of weeks. After the direct income support terminates, within that three-year time frame and that five-year time frame, individuals are still entitled to active measures and services, to qualify for a training intervention and be provided with some supports that would assist in partaking in a training intervention.

Socio economic disadvantages to specific communities.
The issues around communities where there are significant disadvantages and a need for looking at the long term. HRDC is very conscious of the different needs of different communities and looking at long term versus short term and applying that consistently across the province is a growing piece which requires their continuous work with communities so that they are aware of all the barriers and all issues presented in those communities. It is part of their whole approach of having a "can do" approach in Nova Scotia.

Employing persons with disabilities.
There are a variety of programs that are not limited to simply providing access to training. There are significant efforts, whether it is through the EAPD, or the Opportunities Fund and Employment Assistance Services, which is available to all unemployed Canadians. A variety of services are available to facilitate that transition from training to the labor market and how to access employers.

It can also take the form of a targeted wage subsidy to help the employer learn how to accommodate the skilled person who has a barrier and facilitate their placement in the labor market or a Persons with Disabilities Partnership Committees, those are the vehicles through which HRDC hears the community and will be facilitating programming that meets their needs so that they can attach to the labor market in a successful and sustainable way.

Labour Market Trends.
There have been a lot of media coverages with respect to specific sectors, trying to highlight their labour issues, in terms of shortages. HRDC is involved in intergovernmental efforts around labour market information to address what the skills issues are in Nova Scotia. The issue is not isolated to one industry sector or another, it is a reflection of the demographics that is happening presently. As a result, with a thriving economy and a growing economy, there is more demand for fewer skilled workers. Efforts need to be put in looking at the available labour supply and ensuring that these sectors are prepared for the changes in the labour market so clients can take advantage of the opportunities available. That is the direction of the partnerships that HRDC has with industry through their sector councils, with communities, training institutions and with the province.

HRDC is involved with nine sector council partnerships and they (HRDC) are finding the same shortages reflected in their dialogue with all of those sector councils. Broadly across most of HRDC industry sectors one of their focuses is to provide access to opportunities in the labour market to women, Aboriginal people, African-Nova Scotians to persons with disabilities. They do indicate those principles and goals very clearly with their sector partners.

Accountability.
The need to streamline the paperwork and the requirements to demonstrate takes a lot of time to percolate through the process is an issue that non-profit organizations certainly raise and especially after some of the issues and controversies around the need for accountability. HRDC did have an internal audit that identified some issues with the way they were managing projects and certainly some of the accountability and audit trails were not satisfactory from the viewpoint of both the internal audit and the fed. Auditor General. HRDC took immediate steps to address those concerns and issues that were raised. As a result, their administrative practices had to be strengthened.

What they are attempting to do is to apply the maximum amount of flexibility to be able to accomplish what the citizens in communities and non-profit organizations need, recognizing though that they must also stay true to the accountabilities that are expected of them. HRDC is doing their utmost to ensure that they can find a balance between satisfying their accountbilities, they are well documented, and also meeting the needs of individuals, communities and organizations.

Documentation Requested

The documentation requested by the committee was:
Information on the success of employment with respect to persons with disabilities and also information on the opportunities fund.

A copy of the transcript of this meeting is available from the Legislative Committees Office. The transcript can also be found online at the following address:
http://www.gov.ns.ca/legi/hansard/comm/cs/cs010524.htm

STATEMENT OF SUBMISSION

All of which is respectfully submitted to the House of Assembly
this 24th day of January, 2002

Mrs. Mary Ann McGrath, MLA (Chairperson)
(Halifax - Bedford Basin)

I concur

Mr. Cecil O'Donnell, MLA
(Shelburne)

I concur

~~Mr. Michel Samson~~, MLA
~~(Richmond)~~
(Glace Bay)

I concur

Mr. John Chataway, MLA
(Chester-St. Margaret's)

I concur

Mr. Paul MacEwan, MLA
(Cape Breton Nova)

I concur

Mrs. Muriel Baillie, MLA
(Pictou West)

I concur

Ms. Maureen MacDonald, MLA
(Halifax - Needham)

I concur

Mr. David Hendsbee, MLA
(Preston)

I concur

Mr. Jerry Pye, MLA
(Dartmouth North)

Committee Membership

During the 2nd Session of the 58th General Assembly of the House of Assembly, the make-up of the Standing Committee on Community Services comprised the following members:

Mr. Cecil O'Donnell, MLA (Chairman)
(Shelburne)

Mr. Ronald Chisholm, MLA
(Port Hawkesbury)

Mr.Richard Hurlburt, MLA
(Yarmouth)

Mr. John Chataway, MLA
(Chester - St. Margaret's)

Mr. Cecil Clarke, MLA
(Cape Breton North)

Mr. Paul MacEwan, MLA
(Cape Breton Nova)

Mr. Michel Samson, MLA
(Richmond)

Ms. Maureen MacDonald, MLA
(Halifax - Needham)

Mr. Jerry Pye, MLA
(Dartmouth North)

The following changes to the committee membership were as follows: Ms. Mary Ann McGrath, MLA (Halifax - Bedford Basin) replaced Mr. Cecil O'Donnell, MLA (Shelburne) as chair; Mr. Cecil O'Donnell, MLA (Shelburne) replaced Mr. Cecil Clarke, MLA (Cape Breton North); Mrs. Muriel Baillie, MLA (Pictou West) replaced Mr. Ronald Chisholm, MLA (Port Hawkesbury); Mr. David Hendsbee, MLA (Preston) replaced Mr. Richard Hurlburt, MLA (Yarmouth).

Mr. Dave Wilson, MLA (Glace Bay) filled-in as the acting member for Mr. Paul MacEwan, MLA (Cape Breton Nova). Mr. MacEwan is still an active member of the committee.

Committee Meetings

The Standing Committee has been meeting on Thursdays, and all meetings are open to the public. During the 2nd Session of the 58th General Assembly the Standing Committee on Community Services has met on the following dates.

February 15, 2001
March 1, 2001
March 29, 2001
April 26, 2001
May 24, 2001
May 31, 2001
May 11, 2000

Notices

Notices of committee meetings are sent to all members of the committee, support staff of the caucus and legislative offices, the House of Assembly Press Gallery, the government wire services and is published on the internet.

Transcripts

Transcripts of the Committee meetings are available from the Legislative Committees Office, 3rd Floor, Dennis Building, 1740 Granville Street, P.O. Box 2630 Station M, Halifax, NS B3J 3N5 or from the provincial government web-site: www.gov.ns.ca/legi/hansard/comm

Annual/Interim Reports

All reports of the Standing Committee on Community Services are compiled by the Legislative Committees Office and forwarded to the committee members for consideration. Once the report is finalized it is then distributed as follows:

The Speaker/Clerk of the House of Assembly; all members of the Legislative Assembly; all presenters who made presentations before the Committee; all Legislative Assemblies and Legislative Libraries across Canada, including the Territories and the media. The report is also available to all persons interested in obtaining a copy from the Legislative Committees Office or through the provincial government web-site.

Acknowledgments

The Standing Committee on Community Services wishes to extend its gratitude to the following for their time and cooperation:

The Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia; the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre; Ms. Louise VanWart, Author of Testing the Limits: An Examination of Family Housing Affordability in Nova Scotia; Community Action on Homelessness; Kings County Alternative Transportation Services; Guysborough/Antigonish Dial-A-Ride Association; the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities; the Department of Community Services; Human Resources Development Canada; and the Society for Women Healing from Addictions and Abuse. Special thanks goes to Mr. Robert Kinsman, Manager of Hansard; Hansard Staff; to Mr. Don Ledger, Co-ordinator of Legislative Television and Broadcasting; Legislative Television Staff; to Mr. Michael Laffin, Co-ordinator, House of Assembly Operations; House of Assembly Staff; and to Margaret Murphy, Legislative Librarian and Librarian Staff.